

THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

This bulletin is published for readers at home and abroad by the Religions Division of the Ministry of Information, London, to elucidate the spiritual issues at stake in the war, and to provide information concerning the British Churches in wartime, as well as their contribution to post-war reconstruction.

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THE SPIRITUAL IDEAS BEHIND JAPANESE HISTORY

In *Spiritual Issues*, No. 246, we published a survey of a book by a Japanese Christian, Mr. Takeda, in which a vigorous effort was made to harmonize Christianity and the Japanese idea of themselves as the Eastern *Herrenvolk*.

We have since received an interesting comment by Dr. L. S. Albright, of the American Office of the International Missionary Council. We think readers may find it interesting to see this paper. We are not in a position to pronounce on the historical matters raised in the article, while Dr. Albright's estimate of the future must be taken as a personal opinion.

"There are two main strains in modern Japanese history, the Progressive and the Traditionalist, and, of course, various combinations of the two.

"Since the Meiji Restoration in 1868 the Progressive element has been apparent in phenomenal developments including the drafting and granting of a constitution, the setting up of a Diet and House of Peers, the building of railways, the establishment of posts and telegraphs, the development of industry and commerce, the building of a merchant marine, the inauguration of new educational techniques and the application of science to many aspects of life. Unfortunately, the Study Commissions which visited Europe and America recommended 'no change' in the matter of religion, so Shinto remained, quiescent but available to those who might try to revive it. However, in University and reading circles the general attitudes developed by science were applied to the Japanese mythology, causing criticism,

contempt and re-interpretation according to the individual or group concerned, and government theory developed in the direction of an ultimate constitutional monarchy, as indicated by the fact that Dr. Minobe's 'organ theory' of the Emperor was published and taught for thirty years without challenge.

"However, traditionalism was by no means dead. Indeed, the anomaly is that the Traditionalists, through the researches in Japanese mythology and history carried out by a succession of scholars culminating in a group within the Tokugawa family at Mito, were at once responsible for the Restoration of the Imperial Family and all unwillingly for the transfer of power from the Tokugawa to the clans of the South-West and for the insweep of Westernism consequent upon the opening of the country. But the Traditionalists have never been able to accept the implications of their own work. Having restored the Emperor and having revived Shinto, they wanted to freeze society. When that proved to be impossible, in view of the new currents from abroad, they became reactionary, treating their national heritage not in a creative way but with a total lack of literary and historical criticism and an entire absence of insight and imagination. And Mr. Takeda, though a Christian, falls into the same general error.

"The Sun Goddess is not merely *not* the original deity in Japan, but is actually a late-comer and an interloper in the pantheon and was never quite successfully assimilated to it (a female chief deity in a patriarchal society). I suspect that the titular deity of the Yamato people was originally a male sun

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deity. Finding a more primitive matriarchal society in Japan, the Yamato people imposed their own patriarchal system but compromised in religion by merging their male sun deity with a Japanese female deity as a Sun Goddess—something unique in mythology I believe.

"Similarly, the Traditionalists just will not recognize that the Kojiki (A. D. 1712) and the Nihongi (A. D. 720) are obviously court writings to bolster Shinto and the Imperial Family against Buddhism and the Chinese pragmatism in regard to their Imperial Line. Moreover the Kojiki manifestly contains various cycles of legends and tradition reflecting different parts of the country and the fortunes of the Yamato people in subduing it. It is the stuff of which history might be made but as such is not itself history.

"The Traditionalists gloss over or deny the shabby, even shameful treatment of their Emperors as manifest deities by the court nobles, the military oligarchs, the various shogunates, and now the military, supported by the secret societies, the jingo press and young Fascist officials. For the larger part of Japanese history the prerogatives and the powers of the Emperors, whether manifest deities or no, have actually been usurped in one way or another, sometimes politely but none the less really.

"However, the Traditionalists have seen clearly that in the clash of cultures represented by the influx of Westernism, it is not just a question of influence or of admixture but of the very survival of the Japanese culture-complex, including Japan's mythology, social structure and State mission. Liberalism, democracy, individualism, capitalism, constitutionalism and Christianity must undermine and destroy 'the national polity peculiar to Japan' sooner or later. Hence the reaction against everything Western except physical science and military science (organization, uniforms, weapons) and the revival of everything Japanese, involving many inconsistencies such as diatribes against Western individualism and in favour of the Japanese family, and against Western sports in favour of Japanese, although all Japanese sports are matters of individual competition and glory whereas Western sports are based on team competition and group honour. Thus we see, too, the development of a Japanese culture philosophy, national ethics and state metaphysics, utilizing and based upon Japanese mythology. Promoted by propaganda, regi-

mentation and positive action, such doctrines and practices flourish with success. But can they stand defeat, humiliation, the disillusionment of failure?

"The specifically Christian Traditionalists are earnest and sincere, but they suffer for their own faults and our failures. Christianity has been presented in Japan as a faith to be believed rather than as loyalty to a Person. This in spite of the fact that the Japanese are capable of great personal loyalty, as their feudal history and the Roman Catholic persecutions over 250 years ago amply demonstrates. Thus in Takeda's study the question of the relation of the Sun Goddess and the Christian God is raised, but apparently not the relation of the Emperor as God manifest and Jesus. Eventually that will become the real centre of a clash of loyalties and when it does come we must pray earnestly for our Japanese Christian friends, for they will go through a veritable purgatory of conflicting claims and loyalties.

"On the other hand, our Japanese friends, even Christians, are strangely critical of many things Western and curiously naive about their own history and culture. Takeda asserts that 'His Imperial Majesty's direct descent from the Sun Goddess is a strictly historical fact.' The belief is based ultimately upon the Kojiki, according to which the average age of the first sixteen sovereigns is exactly ninety-six years, but the second sixteen a little over sixty years. As is usually the case in court chronicles, historicity increases as the record approaches the time of writing. Elsewhere Takeda declares of the belief in Japan as the 'Country of the Gods founded by Divine Will,' that 'as a matter of fact most of our people will acknowledge that this belief is something instinctively born in all Japanese, inherited with their blood from their ancestors.' In which case it should appear in second and even third generation Japanese in North and South America but does not, except by special indoctrination.

"Mr. Takeda also insists on the unique nature of the Japanese Imperial Family, 'from ages eternal.' However, even 2,600 years does not add up so high, and there is good reason to believe that Japanese Chroniclers added a cycle of 600 years to their history to bring it more into line with that of the much older China from which so much of her culture had come. But under monogamy and succession by primogeniture, with polygamy and the custom of adoption within the royal clan, there is nothing

remarkable about it at all. (The present Emperor's resolute refusal to take a concubine was finally rewarded and he now has two sons by the Empress.)

"Moreover, it is a strangely uncritical claim—that a royal family so founded and a civilization so based is necessarily more spiritual than one resting on an hereditary but constitutional monarchy or a republic led by a president elected by the free will of the citizens. One can overlook these stock-in-trade claims in ordinary Japanese propagandists; in a Christian writer we must take exception to such un-selfcritical attitudes and statements.

"If Christianity is of God, it must have its way with Japanese culture as with every other, leavening it also into what is truly Christian. If Jesus is the Messiah, he fulfils and supersedes all previous revelations and manifestations whatever, and supreme loyalty must be given to Him as God's Anointed, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

"Actually, there are many Japanese Christians who recognize clearly the implications of their Christian faith and during the 'thirties one frequently heard Japanese pastors include petitions for the Emperor in their public prayers. Praying to God, for the Emperor; what could make the relative positions clearer? I'm sure that the gendarmes realized it, too, but after the Questionnaire of the Osaka Division of the Gendarmerie back-fired, being repudiated in Tokyo, a frontal clash was avoided at the time of the formation of the Church of Christ in Japan. The defeat of the military will tend to discredit the myth of divine Emperor, sacred land and super-race, and the processes of free education, preaching and discussion should provide Japan with a liberal constitutional and Christian basis for society. It may take longer than in Germany, but it will surely replace the present reversion to primitivism and all that is involved."

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS AND THE PEACE

Canon Guy Rogers, Rector of Birmingham, wrote in the *Birmingham Post* (January 16th, 1945):

"It is well known that the Christian Church, and by the Church I mean Church members, clergy and laity alike, has been divided on the subject of Christian duty during the present war. The vast majority were satisfied that of all the alternatives

open to them the one which presented the least moral difficulty was to join in the defence of the country and the defeat of the Nazi menace.

"A small minority decided on equally conscientious grounds to take as little part as possible in this defence and resistance. They did not feel free to refuse their money, taken from them in the ordinary course of taxation, or to feed themselves and their families with the food brought at great cost in human lives by the Navy and Merchant Service. They continued to enjoy the rights of free speech and other privileges of citizenship guarded by the Navy, Army and Air Force in which they could not conscientiously serve.

"The fellow-Christians respected their position although they could not always understand it. They appeared at tribunals to testify to their sincerity; they protested when differential treatment of them was attempted. They made much of the services they rendered to the community.

"Now that the war is drawing to a close with a great peril averted, a great deliverance achieved, in which the conscientious objector, owing to his convictions, has taken little or no voluntary part, a perplexing situation has arisen.

"Some conscientious objectors are now throwing themselves vigorously into the work of making the peace and demanding that it should be made upon lines which seem to imply that there had never been any serious danger to national security or the Christian faith, or to general morals or European culture.

"In other words, they are apparently asking for a peace in which security shall not be assisted by force but guaranteed by goodwill alone. Though prevented, by their principles, from fighting on behalf of civic rights threatened with extinction, they do not find it inconsistent to exercise these rights preserved through the sacrifice of others. They conscientiously claim to dictate national policy and occasionally do so with a touch of self-righteousness which their Christian brethren of the majority find a little trying!

"We cannot help feeling that it is those who have suffered most and sacrificed most, the young Christian people of the Services, who have the better claim to speak on behalf of the Christian Church. It is they and their children who come after them, who will have to bear the brunt, not the conscientious

objector if things go wrong in the future. Their lives may depend on the coming settlement.

"I venture to put this point of view before my friends of the Christian minority, asking them if it is not possible for them to be as tolerant to their brethren in the making of peace as we have been to them in the making of war. Some whom I know personally are sympathetic and understanding, and quick to recognize the rights of other people's consciences as well as of their own. Others, however, are less considerate.

"May I be allowed to say that the pacifism which, in our judgment, helped to bring us to the brink of political destruction in 1938 can hardly become the main plank in the Christian policy of 1945. If we of the majority and the minority are to work together to resist peace settlements based on revenge or racialism, and to seek for a peace which will bring a new security to the peoples of Europe, based on righteousness and fellowship, we must have a better understanding than 'pacifism' affords."

A JOINT MESSAGE OF THE PROTESTANT AND ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS

The following message was issued to be read out from the pulpits of all Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches in Holland on December 17th, 1944:—

The Churches of the Netherlands feel it their bounden duty to address you in the following words:—

After all that our people has suffered as a result of the occupation they are now threatened by the greatest disaster of all—destruction through starvation.

In the West of our country four-and-a-half million Dutchmen are suffering great hardship through lack of food. We know that continuous prayer for deliverance, such as the Churches now urge, rises up to God in heaven.

Never was it more deeply realized what it

means to pray "Give us this day our daily bread." But we must understand that we are paying that we may all have it. This prayer turns into a curse if our actions are in complete contradiction to it. We ask God: "Will you give it us," and therefore we do not take it at the expense of others. While we call upon God's mercy, our hearts must be moved to help others as best we can.

The Churches, in the name of God, appeal to all to carry together the burden of this great distress and to lighten it as much as possible. The Churches know that in the matter of the food supply there exists a maze of iniquities which they cannot unravel. But in the name of the Lord the Churches must attempt to save what can be saved. But even if this effort is brought to nought God's will be done. How much more could be mentioned here.

Therefore, the Churches in these days, just before the festival of God's mercy, appeal to all who listen to us. Do to the best of your knowledge and strength what you can do for others. The Churches condemn in the sharpest terms the impermissible black market. Desist from this terrible iniquity.

The Churches urge you with all their strength to follow exactly in the present calamity the instructions of the Dutch authorities as long as they can keep control of the food supply. The farmers in particular should now discharge their calling and their duty towards the suffering part of our people, as so many of them have already done with great loyalty.

And let the bargees and others concerned with transport face the dangers now that all means of transport are so greatly hampered and collaborate to save four-and-a-half million countrymen from death through hunger.

While the word of the Lord: "I have been hungry and you have fed me" must burn in our hearts, we pray to our God in Heaven, that He may make us live in accordance with His Word and Law: "You shall love the Lord God above all else and your neighbour like yourself."